

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

For Immediate Release

June 14, 2012

When Mary Oates Walker was appointed Chief Administrative Law Judge in January 2010, the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) was an underperforming agency. A backlog of thousands of cases existed, some of which were more than eight years old. There was a pervasive culture of indifference. Drastic changes in staffing, personnel management and administration were required in order to transform the agency into a productive one. These changes have been unpopular, especially with employees who, for years, received pay and benefits with little accountability. Today, as a result of these changes, the agency's performance has significantly improved and the case backlog has been virtually eliminated.

The letter sent to Councilmember Mendelson by certain staff members is incorrect in a number of respects, including the implication that OAH influenced another agency's selection of the relocation vendor for OAH's move. OAH does not have the authority to select vendors or award contracts.

The claim in the letter regarding a lack of transparency in management decisions is also false. OAH has a 12-member management team that is fully-staffed with experienced professionals. In addition, 11 of the 15 signatories to the letter are currently participating in a joint committee formed to review current case assignment and performance standard models, and provide policy recommendations. As such, the suggestion in the letter that policy decisions are made "in secret" is unfounded. Several of the issues raised in the letter involve personnel actions, which are confidential and not subject to comment.

None of the concerns voiced in the letter have ever been raised by the signatories with the Chief ALJ. Unfortunately, staff members thought it appropriate to share their concerns with local news outlets prior to bringing them to management. The management team will, however, continue to make the hard decisions necessary to fulfill the agency's mission and better serve the citizens of the District of Columbia.

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